

A weekend of passion...

My mobile phone rang in my pocket. The display told me it was "Park Street Studios" but the voice on the other end was that of Paul Haley. "Where are you?" he said. Not an unreasonable question since he and 11 other members from the Yorkshire region were waiting for our arrival in a holiday cottage in the Yorkshire Dales. I hasten to add at this point that we weren't late but they were hungry and about to order a take away to be delivered for what was to be the first night of a fantastic few days away together.

That night was very much an ice breaker since not everybody knew each other. There were guests from Wales and new members from Yorkshire for whom this would be the first MPA meeting they had attended since joining. Paul had thought about this carefully and prepared, in great detail, a wine tasting session. "Sip or sniff" was his advice. Apart from one member I didn't actually see anyone sniffing! By the end of the tasting we were all chilled out and felt like we had known each other for years. We all talked long into the night that first night - all gathered around the most wonderful log fire.

The next morning the cameras were out in force and it was planned that Paul was going to talk about lighting techniques. However as the group shared tips with each other and compared notes about flash guns, recent weddings and "this is how I find it works best" the morning passed before any of us had chance to notice it was almost past lunchtime! Andy Hopkinson quickly became known as "gadget man" with Kate Cooper very keen to "have a rummage through his bag"! "OMG - what do you do with this?" she asked pulling out of the bag a blue, plastic cigar shaped device which whirred and vibrated at the touch of a button as a brush like head spun into action. "It's for cleaning the chips on the DSLR's" replied Andy with a huge grin on his face. The artichoke butterflies had caused much amusement and suffice to say I'm not sure I will be allowing Andy to get it out in public as it were! The next out of the bag was the pag (video) light and charger. There quickly ensued an explanation of when & how Andy & I use the video light.

By far the strangest looking gadget award has to go to Paul

A group of Yorkshire Region members organised their own photo retreat in a Dales cottage



It looks a bit warmer indoors than out for our photographic ventures. Lightsphere, right, not stolen loo cistern float...



Haley, however, for his Gary Fong Lightsphere - especially the mark 1 version. However, mock not, the results from trying it out on the second morning were pretty impressive - so much so that Andy & I bought one each the following week at Focus. For the uninitiated in this strange device basically the mark 1 version is a plastic dome like contraption and it was quickly likened by Kate to the ballcock in a toilet cistern - (Paul Cooper's comments on what it reminded him of however remain unprintable). The Lightsphere sits over the head of a regular flashgun. When the flash fires the Lightsphere disperses the light in such a way to create a shadowless image. The mark 2 version was slightly less obtrusive and gave a slightly more favourable result in my humble opinion.

The afternoon saw several of the party taking a trip into Skipton. A couple of the members had never visited Skipton Castle (well worth a visit if you are in the area and have 2 - 3 hours to spare) and so went

off, cameras in hand to learn a bit of history. Other members went in search of ingredients for the meal which Joanne Doody and her husband Andy had volunteered to cook that evening. The rest of the party - Andy & I included stayed at the cottage.

I have to say that afternoon was one of the most valuable, relaxing and informative afternoons I have had in a long time. Paul had invited along his friend and sometimes colleague Richard Crossley, a Maltese guy (the one from Wales) along with his wife Marisa. Combine Richards' passion for and love of photography along with his Mediterranean roots and you have a pretty potent combination. We exchanged views, tips, tried out different software each other uses and had a wonderful afternoon. The potential of us all there together with our different skills and areas of photography we are passionate about could be felt even if it wasn't vocalised at the time.

Yet suddenly amongst all this passing of information and enthusiasm the room went deadly quiet. Paul Haley was showing Paul Cooper some recent pictures he had shot which he thought may be in preparation for a Fellowship Panel. We could all tell from the expression on his face as he looked at the laptop screen across the table that Paul (C) was impressed. As he quietly commented on the images in front of him others gathered around to see what he was looking at. It was one of those quiet moments of great respect when you and those around you suddenly realise that you are in the presence of someone who is a Master at his craft. The images were simply stunning. I cannot describe them here because if and when Paul decides to submit them for his Fellowship Panel then I think that is another piece waiting to be written. There is a story behind each and every one of the images waiting to be told.

Again we chatted around the fire late into the night. The following morning saw the keenest amongst us up & out with both Pauls for a session about fill in flash and lighting techniques. Here we saw the Lightsphere come into it's own as we wandered in the grounds of the cottages and Paul took pictures under different lighting conditions. We talked about lots of different ways of lighting subjects, especially weddings in bright sunlight and churches in darkness and even the most informed of us learnt something.

I'm sad to say that Andy and I had to leave the gathering at this point, although it went on for a further 2 days as we had personal commitments which we had to meet back home. At least one new business was formed during the few days we were there and our business, at least, is strengthened by knowledge we have gained and put into practise just since we returned home.

I would like to thank Paul Haley especially for all the effort he put into making the days as fun and yet informative as possible and also the other members and their partners who attended for being such good company. To anyone who thought about attending but didn't - shame - you missed a really brilliant few days - see you there next time!

- Sharon Malone